

Today, Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) led a bipartisan letter to Nancy Sutley, the Chairwoman of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), supporting the Council's responsible position on biomass utilization. DeFazio's letter was signed by nineteen Members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Last month, CEQ directed federal agencies to inventory their greenhouse gas emissions and establish reduction targets. While agencies must report on all sources of emissions, the CEQ directive exempts biomass emissions from reduction targets since the Council considers biomass to be carbon-neutral.

CEQ's policy contradicts a recent regulatory rule from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that considers biomass emissions on par with fossil fuel emissions. The EPA appears to be moving forward with rules to regulate facilities that use biomass material to generate heat and power. Not having a clear federal policy on biomass is preventing businesses from making smart investments in clean technology.

"The last thing we need right now is more uncertainty to prevent businesses from making investments and hiring workers. If done sustainably and responsibly, biomass utilization can be a carbon-neutral source of energy," DeFazio said. "Federal agencies should acknowledge this and get on the same page so that we can get biomass material to local facilities to generate clean energy while simultaneously creating jobs."

In the letter, DeFazio calls on CEQ and the EPA to develop a sensible, consistent, scientifically-based policy that recognizes the carbon-neutrality of sustainable biomass sources.

"We need a clear policy to responsibly address the challenges of climate change, provide predictability to businesses that utilize biomass, and move the United States towards energy independence," DeFazio said.

Biomass utilization is an important issue in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. Fuel-reduction and forest health projects on federal lands generate thousands of tons of wood chips, slash, brush, and thinning every year. Current practice is to pile and burn this material in the woods,

which is bad for soils and air quality. A better approach would be to produce local, renewable energy with these materials at local facilities. However, businesses are hesitant to invest in the infrastructure needed to transport and process biomass until federal policy is more certain.

The full text of the letter is below:

Nancy Sutley

Chairwoman

Council on Environmental Quality

730 Jackson Place, NW

Washington, DC 20503

Dear Chairwoman Sutley:

It has come to our attention that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) solicited public and agency comment on draft guidance titled "Federal Greenhouse Gas Accounting and Reporting." We are writing to commend CEQ for making a clear distinction in the draft between emissions from biogenic sources -- such as biomass and biofuel -- and fossil fuels. Such a distinction is not only scientifically supported, but is critical to the responsible development of biomass utilization in the United States that can help reduce our reliance on fossil fuels.

As you know, the draft guidance calls for federal agencies to report their emissions from the combustion of both biofuel and biomass. However, while agencies must clearly identify and report biogenic emissions, CEQ, at pp. 16-17, makes clear that biogenic emissions:

“...are not subject to agency reduction targets at this time. This is because part or all of the carbon in these fuels comes from carbon that was fixed by biological sources in the recent past, so depending on the full emission impact of biomass production and use, they may not represent a net increase in the atmospheric carbon (since the carbon was removed from the atmosphere while the plant was alive). This contrasts with carbon from fossil fuels, which was removed from the atmosphere millions of years ago, hence its combustion represents a net increase in atmospheric carbon relative to what may have otherwise naturally occurred. The CO₂ from biogenic sources is assumed to be naturally “recycled” since the carbon in the biofuel was in the atmosphere before the plant was grown and would have been released normally through decomposition after the plant died.”

CEQ’s explanation demonstrates why emissions from biogenic sources should not be included in greenhouse gas reduction targets at this time. If responsible and sustainably utilized, biogenic sources can be a carbon-neutral source of energy. This basic rationale underlies numerous national and international renewable energy policies, including those adopted by the American Clean Energy and Security Act passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in June, 2009. We urge you to maintain this policy in the final Guidelines.

Regrettably, not all federal agencies have taken this position. As you are aware, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) determined not to differentiate between biogenic emission sources and those from fossil fuels in its May 12, 2010, Prevention of Significant Deterioration (PSD) and Title 5 Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Tailoring Rule (Tailoring Rule). EPA has recently finalized its comment period on a Call for Information seeking public input on appropriate accounting methods for carbon emissions from biogenic sources and how to address these emissions under the Tailoring Rule and the Clean Air Act. We have attached for your information the letter we sent EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson on this issue in response to the Agency’s treatment of emissions from biogenic sources in the Tailoring Rule.

President Obama has emphasized that renewable energy derived from feedstocks such as forest biomass hold the key to transitioning the nation to a “sustainable, low carbon energy future.” We urge you to fulfill the President’s vision and work with Administrator Jackson and other federal agency heads to develop a sensible, consistent, scientifically-based policy that recognizes the carbon-neutrality of biogenic sources. Such a policy is crucial to responsibly addressing the challenges of climate change, providing predictability to businesses that utilize

biogenic sources, and moving the United States towards energy independence.

Again, we commend you and the Council for your leadership on this issue and look forward to working with CEQ on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Peter DeFazio

Jo Bonner

Michael Michaud

Bobby Bright

Kurt Schrader

Mike McIntyre

James Oberstar

Bart Stupak

Stephanie Herseth Sandlin

Cathy McMorris Rodgers

David Wu

Roscoe Bartlett

Mike Ross

Norm Dicks

Rick Larsen

Walter Jones

G.K. Butterfield

Dan Boren

Brian Baird

